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## EDUCATIONAL WRITINGS

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### REPORTS OF CITY BOARDS OF EDUCATION

More and more we are coming to perceive that social control in a democracy grows out of enlightened public opinion. The more complicated the social organization, and the more important its labors, the greater is the necessity for this public enlightenment. Of all community functions, education ranks first on both counts. It probably is the most complicated social enterprise requiring the control of public opinion, and it probably also is the most important of the various social enterprises.

School officials in a city have various modes of keeping the general public informed as to the work of the schools. The public press offers an opportunity that is much utilized. Talks before parents' associations, business men's associations, women's clubs, civic organizations, etc., present other opportunities. Information given the public through these media tends to be fragmentary, disconnected, and even superficial. The addresses at their best in a city can reach but a limited audience. The medium of publicity *par excellence* employed by school officials is the annual or biennial report of the board of education. This report offers the superintendent, the clerk of the board, the architect, the auditor, and the other officials an opportunity to lay before the public the things which the public needs to know in order rightly to judge of the effectiveness of the service.

An important practical question arises: What kinds of facts, in what form, and in what quantity should each of the school officials lay before the general public for its enlightenment concerning the activities of his department? It is important that the essential things be presented, and that they be presented in a way that can be effectively grasped by the general public. The facts must lie pretty well upon the surface, so that they can be taken in without effort; and the things that belong together in judging the effectiveness of the school work should be placed together.

Professional men even are sufficiently uninformed as to statistical presentation of facts; laymen are still less informed. They cannot be expected to pore over meaningless statistical tables. They need figures reduced, digested, and organized, so that their significance lies clearly upon the surface and can be taken in at a glance.

It is always interesting to inquire into what superintendents think the community needs to know about the affairs of its schools. An examination of the reports of superintendents and other officials reveals their judgment in the matter. They seem not to be very well agreed as to what should be presented, nor as to the mode of presentation. A valuable and practical piece of research would be an examination of the city reports of all of our cities and a determination of the consensus of opinion as to what ought to be given to a community for its enlightenment on school questions, and as to the mode of organizing and presenting these materials. In the present article we are examining a few reports taken at random to see what they deem advisable.

The last report of the schools of Newton, Massachusetts,<sup>1</sup> drawn up by Superintendent Spaulding just previous to his departure, is addressed definitely "To the Citizens of Newton and especially to His Honor, the Mayor, and to the Honorable, the Board of Aldermen." Former reports had been addressed to the School Board. This one, however, is somewhat more clearly designed than previous ones to furnish information needed by the citizens in passing judgment upon the work of the schools. In Mr. Spaulding's opinion the public needs to know just one thing. He says: "This report will confine itself to one single issue. Indeed there seems to be but one issue today concerning the Newton schools. That issue, while difficult to solve, is simple to comprehend. It concerns the cost, not the details of expenditure but the total cost, of maintaining the school system." His report attempts to answer the two questions: Why are the schools so expensive? How can expenses be reduced? On the basis of the information presented in the report he then presents a question

<sup>1</sup> *The Newton Public Schools*. Annual Report of School Committee, Newton, Massachusetts, No. 74, 1913.

on which he desires community judgment: Shall school expenditures be reduced; or shall the present educational policy be maintained?

The question at issue seems to have been raised by a minority of the Board of Aldermen as to the annual appropriation for public schools. It is this board that makes the actual appropriations. It is, however, only the agent of the general community, and in the long run, at least, must obey the dictates of the citizens of the community. Public enlightenment clearly is necessary in order that the efficiency of the schools be not impaired by a group of men intent upon diverting money into other and perhaps for them more profitable channels. Under the circumstances it is natural that the superintendent should attempt to focus attention entirely upon this one large problem and to confine his message solely to its discussion. This he does with his usual effectiveness. He presents in clear, connected, readable statements the policy that has guided educational thought and labors in Newton for many years. He shows how the attempt has been made to provide educational opportunities adapted to the individual needs of every boy and girl from four to eighteen years of age. He shows the need, in order to do this, of a special school for abnormal children, special individual help for the 10 per cent of weaker pupils, high schools opened to all pupils of high-school age who are preparing themselves for any vocational destiny whatsoever, evening schools, summer vacation schools, kindergartens, playgrounds, and the vocational school, which is designed for pupils who do not take the high-school work. The report also shows that although living costs have been increasing during the past five years the expenditure for schools per pupil in every department of the Newton system is now less than it was five years ago. The Board has increased the size of classes and increased the number of periods taught by teachers without greatly increasing teachers' salaries. In some cases teachers' salaries have been actually reduced. Comparisons with other cities are introduced showing that the classes in the high schools, for example, are larger in Newton than in almost any other city in the entire state of Massachusetts. Comparisons with other cities as to the length of the teachers' day or as to the

salaries of teachers in Newton are not presented. They would certainly be of service.

The reports of the Newton schools for some years past have in fact dealt chiefly with this very same problem, and in a manner not greatly different from that of this latest report. It would appear that the question has been before the community for some time. Very little place is given in any of the recent reports to the curriculum, to the student population, to the teaching population, to parents' associations, to social activities of the schools. It seems that current discussion of these and other similar things should also be presented to the community. Developments are rapid in these days, and competing interests are so numerous that even an informed public soon has its information pushed out into the margin of consciousness or even into complete oblivion. Current reports should deal with the various aspects of the work of the schools. The various labors must be understood and appreciated by the general community before the community will be in a position to sanction their continuance and to pay for their support. The topic of finance cannot in fact be handled separate and apart from the other educational activities. The need of continued support cannot be made clear by discussing finance directly. It is made clear only by showing the social needs of those particular things for which the finances pay.

The form of the report presents a valuable suggestion. It handles only one topic. It looks at this matter from many angles. Understanding is not confused by the introduction of a multitude of different kinds of materials looked at from different points of view. It is not so much like an encyclopedic reference book of facts as it is like a readable news article. It possesses unity and sequence and is therefore a document that the citizens can read. Most reports, built on the plan of the *World Almanac*, are valuable chiefly as reference documents. The suggestion referred to is the putting out by a superintendent, not of a formal and often formidable volume of relatively disconnected material without news interest, but in its stead a series of smaller pamphlets, each dealing with a single aspect of the school's work and distributed over the entire school year. A compact document of from 300 to

600 pages, such as some of our city reports with their array of figures and statistical charts, looks altogether too formidable even for the wide-awake, public-spirited citizen. If there could be a series of reports on the different phases of the work presented at different times in the year, each one of them simple, unified, and possessing news interest, there is far greater probability that these publicity documents would serve the purpose for which they are printed.

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The Louisville publicity document<sup>1</sup> contains messages to the community from the city superintendent, the business director, the medical department, the secretary-treasurer, and the parent-teachers' associations. The superintendent first calls the community's attention to twenty-four kinds of improvements that have been effected during the past few years. To this only four pages are given. If these twenty-four new movements have been adequately presented to the community in previous documents, such a summary presents an excellent retrospective survey of past accomplishment. If, however, this constitutes the original statement of work to the community, each topic is handled so briefly that it can scarcely make any impression upon the community consciousness. It certainly does not give the facts necessary for community judgment. To this summary is appended nine further educational improvements yet to be accomplished.

Following this introductory statement the attention of the community is called to the million-dollar bond issue recently voted and it is announced that this additional revenue is to be employed in carrying forward the nine projected improvements. One expects at this point to find the report taking up a discussion of these various improvements in order that the community may be prepared to understand and to co-operate with the work as it proceeds. This, however, is not done. In the portion of the volume that follows there are brief discussions of a great number and variety of unrelated topics. Each one deals with a matter of interest to the community. When the various aspects of

<sup>1</sup> *Second Report of the Board of Education of Louisville, Ky.*, covering the period from July 1, 1912, to June 30, 1913.

education are treated so briefly, abstractly, and disconnectedly, the report, while it may be intelligible for the professional educator, in many cases at least does not seem to present the facts in such a manner and in such quantity that laymen can read and form intelligent judgments as to the work of the schools. And publicity documents are intended for laymen. Some of the topics here treated relate intimately to certain of the nine proposed improvements. Sometimes the relation to the improvements is shown and sometimes it is not.

Many of the facts are presented very effectively. In treating the need of playgrounds, for example, a full-page photograph is presented showing the school yard at one of the schools to be but a narrow, brick-paved passageway between two brick walls about six feet apart. Relative expenditures per pupil in elementary and high schools is made clear by very effective pictograms, and by tabular historical comparisons showing the trend of expenditures in both types of schools for the past six years. In showing the need of increased salaries among elementary teachers there is presented a table showing the average salary of elementary teachers for each year from 1896 to 1914; the percentage of increase of salary each year over that received in 1896; Bradstreet's price-index number for each of those years; the percentage of increase of this price-index year by year over that of 1896; and the resultant actual decline of teachers' salaries since 1896. During this time, the figures show, teachers' salaries have increased 42 per cent while the cost of living has increased 56 per cent. This relative decline of teachers' salaries is shown effectively in graphic form as well.

Rightly to judge of this publicity document for Louisville one must put himself in the place of the business man, the mechanic, the grocer, the banker, the housewife, etc., to whom such a document is, or at least ought to be, addressed. When one considers the public as the audience addressed, it is a serious question whether a publicity document should attempt so comprehensive a task as the treatment of so many aspects of the school work in a single issue. Fewer topics treated at a time, more continuity of treatment, more news interest, more of the effectiveness produced by presenting facts in charts, diagrams, pictograms, and

tables of figures so arranged that the meaning can be seen, and shorter intervals between publications would appear to be desirable for more effective community enlightenment.

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A very comprehensive report comes from Rochester, N.Y.<sup>1</sup> The report of the president of the Board, which introduces the volume, is addressed "To the Board of Education." The reports of the secretary and the architect are not addressed to any one but presumably they are directed also to the Board of Education. The major portion of the volume is by the Superintendent of Schools, and is addressed to the Board of Education. Attention is called to this fact because the practice is so common in these publicity documents. It makes a large difference whether the audience is the general community, which is relatively uninformed, and in no great degree interested in the facts concerning the public schools, or whether it is the members of the Board of Education, who are already pretty well informed as to the work of the schools and whose interests are fully awakened. If the report is published for the Board, it seems to be an altogether superfluous waste of money. It contains nothing but what can be obtained by the members of the Board at their meetings and from the records of the offices of the Board and Superintendent. The only justification, it would appear, for so ponderous a volume is the enlightenment of those who are being served by this field of public service, and who are maintaining the service. An examination of the content of the volume does not reveal to whom it is addressed. Much of it certainly cannot be intended for the consumption of the general public. Most of the facts presented—and it bristles with facts—are organized in such a way as to indicate that the volume may be intended for the school officials and other members of the school organization, rather than the general public. On the other hand, from its general spirit and form of organization it may be intended

<sup>1</sup> *The Fifty-sixth Report of the Board of Education of the City of Rochester*, for the years 1911, 1912, 1913, comprising the reports of the President of the Board of Education, the Secretary of the Board, the Architect, the Superintendent of Schools, and the Directors of Departments. 364 pages.



simply as a reference book, and is not addressed to anybody in particular. It would be interesting to know who would obtain copies of a school-publicity document that is a near-reference volume, and what use is made of them by those who receive them. It is not probable that the public who pays the bills and receives the service receives very much enlightenment from a mere reference book. There may be sufficient justification for the expense in the uses made of it by teachers and school officials. It may be desirable to have a volume designed simply for the members of the profession, but it seems desirable also to have the facts presented in such way that they can be understood and appreciated by laymen as well. If this is for the profession, there should be another volume, or better, a series of bulletins, dealing with special aspects of the work, written in form and spirit designed for community consumption. Rochester not long since had occasion to complain that progressive educational school movements were being stifled by the opposition of powerful sections of the community. It is altogether probable that neither Rochester nor any other city will wilfully oppose any movement which really makes for the general welfare. When the movement is really a valuable or necessary one, opposition is probably the fruit of ignorance, and this in turn is the result of the failure of the leaders of the educational movements adequately to take the lay community entirely into their confidence. No valuable educational movement can succeed permanently unless it represents the will of the large majority of a community. Will in such case is the expression of judgment, and judgment requires facts. A publicity document that gives the facts in ways that can be grasped and that will be grasped by the laymen seems to be an absolute necessity.

The Rochester report, when compared with the average publicity document, is a superior piece of work. The facts are presented in quantitative terms so far as possible, and these are often represented in effective graphical form. The figures are in very many cases reduced to unit-terms, thus permitting comparisons of schools with schools within the city and of the schools of the year of the report with those of preceding years. The units chosen are often of a type more accurate than those in current practice. In

comparing the cost of the various types of schools—elementary, high, professional, normal-training, open-air, etc.—the unit used is the *per capita cost per hour* based on actual attendance. This is far more accurate than the usual cost per pupil based upon enrolment or register, and which does not take into account the length of time the pupil is in school per day. In considering the cost of operation, the cost of fuel, and the cost of janitor service, the unit employed is the hundred square feet of floor space. Cost of repairs is given in terms of percentages on the original cost of the building. The volume is also abundantly supplied with excellent graphical representations, which facilitate the making of comparisons. The most serious statistical defect of this report is one that is common to all publications of this class. Facts are presented as to the situation within the given city. They do not, however, show in any degree whether the work of the city is efficient or inefficient. Efficiency is wholly a relative matter. Only by comparing the situation within this city with the standards of current practice can either professional men or laymen judge of the effectiveness of the work. Such standards of current practice can be had by superintendents for use in these reports the moment they decide that they want them. This report, for example, presents the pupil-hour cost of each type of school in Rochester. No one in the community, however, can tell from the facts presented whether the costs there recorded are high, medium, or low. It cannot be expected that each of the various types of school should have the same cost per hour. A standard for the regular high schools must be determined from a study of a large number of city high schools in many cities. Only upon the basis of such a standard of current practice can the work in Rochester be actually judged. The figures presented have relatively little meaning simply because of their isolation. This is one of the two or three most serious defects to be found in practically all city-school reports.

J. F. B.

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The theory and organization of the Fielden Demonstration School of the University of Manchester, England, is interestingly

described in the *Demonstration School Record*,<sup>1</sup> edited by J. J. Findlay, professor of education in that university. This volume is very similar in general character to the *Elementary School Record*, edited by Professor John Dewey in 1900. The latter consisted of a series of monographs which contained descriptions of the curriculum and activities of Professor Dewey's laboratory school at the University of Chicago. In the theoretical discussions in the present volume the influence of Dewey is very prominent. In fact, the Fielden School might well be regarded as an exponent of Dewey's theories. The book contains relatively little Herbartian theory. This is quite striking in view of the fact that Professor Findlay might have been considered in earlier years to be as strong a Herbartian as was Frank McMurry in this country. Other sources of influence are mentioned, such as the writings of G. Stanley Hall. The acceptance of the latter's view of the characteristics of the child's life during the period from eight to twelve years of age seems rather incongruous, in view of Hall's contention that this is the period for "arbitrary memorization, drill, and habituation with little appeal to interest, reason, or understanding."

The chapters dealing with the special subjects of the curriculum contain much concrete and interesting material which should prove very helpful and stimulating, especially to teachers of children from nine to fifteen years of age. It is to be hoped that the so-called experimental schools of the type described in this volume will soon be in a position to become really experimental in the scientific sense by instituting exact measurements of the results of their endeavor. In the past, educationists thought they were conducting scientific experiments when they simply modified the conditions of instruction, entirely disregarding the necessity of precisely measuring the influence of these modifications. They might be compared to an amateur chemist who would start out to produce a certain substance, but would entirely lose sight of the final result in his interest in the intermediate processes of boiling. "Isn't it fine!" he might say; "see how it bubbles!" Similarly, the pseudo-educational experimentalists are prone to say, "Isn't it a fine experiment! See how interested and active the children are!"

S. C. P.

<sup>1</sup> *The Demonstration School Record*, No. 2. Edited by J. J. Findlay. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1913. Pp. 283. \$1.60 net.